

COLUMNS



Tom Watkins

Follow L.G. Calley's Lead: End School Seclusion and Restraint

October 14, 2016

Once again, Lieutenant Governor Brian Calley leads the pack when it comes to treating people with disabilities in Michigan. Even in today's enlightened times, Michigan school children are being placed—inhumanely—in physical restraints and seclusion. These "sanctioned behaviors" taking place in some schools today, would constitute child abuse if done by parents in their own homes.

The reality is that abusive seclusion and restraint being used on our children today is cruel, unacceptable and unnecessary. It is our collective responsibility to stop this practice from being allowed in our schools. These so-called "treatment options" are degrading, barbaric, inappropriate, unnecessary, counter-therapeutic, harmful and, in the extreme, result in serious injury and even death.

This practice must end.

Finally, Action

The Lt. Gov. has initiated legislation to do just that. The bipartisan legislation has been passed out of committee and is on its way to the House and Senate for a vote. He now needs your help to contact your legislator in the House and Senate asking them to support House Bills 5409-5418.

This is not about "politics", but about doing what is right. The Democratic lead in the House has been Representative Frank Liberati from Allen Park. In the Senate, Republican Senators Margaret O'Brien from Portage and Rick Jones from Grand Ledge have been the big proponents. I raised this issue with the Lt. Gov. a couple of years back and he was aghast that this practice was taking place in our schools in the 21st century. He promised to take action – and he has!

Sometimes the ugliness of secluding and restraining children is exposed.

The recent broadcast of a Fox News story shows just how hurtful this practice is to our children. A child with autism at a Lake Orion school was locked in a room for hours. The pain the boy's mom expressed is heartbreaking – she told of her special needs son locked in a padded room for 3 hours: (<http://www.fox2detroit.com/news/local-news/209617098-story>)

The Lt. Gov. spoke passionately about the problem and his proposed solution here with Frank Beckman on WJR: <https://audioboom.com/boos/5130861-brian-calley-Lt.-Gov.ernor-discusses-the-autistic-lake-orion-child-who-was-locked-in-a-room-for-hours-and-a-rally-for-special-education-reform-in-lansing-october-5-2016>.

What makes this insidious behavior difficult to detect is that it is often out of sight of public view and, perversely, often sanctioned by parents, guardians, and credentialed professionals as a proper "therapeutic technique" meant to control or modify behavior. However, it is nearly always abusive, traumatic, and unnecessary.

While some school districts do not use it at all, the practice is utilized in other districts. There is no central state reporting mechanism, so we don't know for sure. In Michigan, in the second decade of the 21st century, there are no laws to stop it. As State Superintendent of Public Schools from 2001-2005, I had the State Board of Education initiate a policy to attempt to curb and regulate this practice. Our efforts, however, did not have the full force of the "law."

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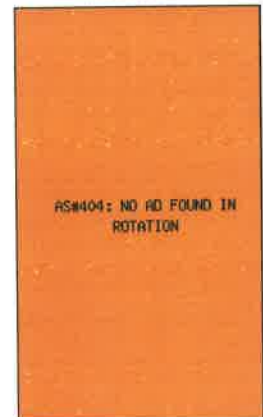
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Lt. Gov. Calley has taken the time to truly listen and learn about this issue from people across the state and is acting to end this unnecessary assault on our children. Jim Dehem, President and CEO of Community Living Services who has worked in the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities for 42 years emphasized, *"This legislation is long overdue and we commend the Lt. Gov. for his leadership."* (communitylivingservices.com)

Dehem continued, *"Community Living Services, Inc. is a non-profit agency, serves over 4,000 people with intellectual and developmental disabilities throughout the metropolitan Detroit area. Most are supported in housing through a network of non-profit providers. These providers hire, train and monitor direct care staff who receive mostly minimum wages. The staff do not use restraint and seclusion rooms. Yet, many times when the same individual goes to school, the much higher paid professional school staff resorts to restraint and seclusion—often hours at a time."*

Dehem points to a better way, *"The use of positive support, identifying early signs or types of events that may trigger behavioral issues and training in establishing a culture of gentleness are effective best practices. We have had hundreds of people who once were in institutions where seclusion and restraint were used daily. With patience and consistent positive approaches, direct care staff is able to completely reverse the negative behavior."*

Change Must Produce Progress

Centuries ago, Niccolo Machiavelli in his book, "The Prince," offered this analysis of the political theater advocates in Michigan and across the country still witness today as they work to pass laws, enact policies, and outlaw these practices: *"It must be considered that there is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, or more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things. For the reformer has enemies in all those who profit by the old order and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would profit by the new order, this 'lukewarmness' arising partly from fear of their adversaries, who have the laws in their favor; and partly from the incredulity of mankind, who do not truly believe in anything new until they have had actual experience of it."*

As a state we must demonstrate that there can be a new order of how people with a mental illness and/or intellectual and developmental disabilities are treated. Lt. Governor Brian Calley spoke passionately at the Kids with IEP's in the shadow of the Capitol Dome.

https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=1196625820399014&id=187156794679269&_rdr

Our advocate, Lt. Gov. Brian Calley, expressed his plea this way, "The use of restraint and seclusion practices in non-emergency situations has been against state policy for 10 years, but unfortunately, the practice still remains. Legislation is currently before the House of Representatives that would secure a better, safer future for some of our most vulnerable children. Passing this law will ensure that all kids are entitled to a safe and dignified education, no matter which school they attend. I urge the House and Senate to send this crucial legislation to the governor's desk before the end of the year."



Michigan's Lieutenant Governor Brian Calley

Lt. Gov. Brian Calley is helping to lead the way. He needs your support. Call and write your legislator now!

Write your House and Senate member and tell them to support House Bills 5409-5418, which will end seclusion and restraint in our schools:

- <http://house.michigan.gov/>
- <http://www.senate.michigan.gov/mobile.html>

Call House Speaker Kevin Cotter and ask that he support these anti seclusion and restraint bills:

Toll-Free: 855-393-9900

Email: KevinCotter@house.mi.Gov



We can wrap our arms around our children with love without using seclusion and restraints.

Thank you Lt. Gov. Calley. Let's hope that legislators from both sides of the political aisle who worked with you to bring this important legislation forward.

Leadership matters!

Tom Watkins served the citizens of Michigan as state superintendent of schools, 2001-05 and deputy, chief deputy and director of the Michigan Department of Mental Health, 1983-90. He can be emailed at: tdwatkins88@gmail.com, or followed on twitter at: [#tdwatkins88](https://twitter.com/tdwatkins88)

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1 response so far ↓

- [1 Richard Stripp](#) // Oct 15, 2016 at 11:31 pm

I was honored to speak with Lt. Gov. Calley and others at a rally recently in Michigan about this so very important issue. The time to pass this much needed legislation is now! Our children need us to protect them.